

Letter to the Editor – *The Arizona Republic*

There has been some confusion regarding special education students and the granting of diplomas.

In 1996, the Arizona legislature passed a statute which provides that the State Board shall “develop and adopt competency tests for the graduation of pupils from high school in at least the areas of reading, writing and mathematics and shall establish passing scores for each such test.”

In 2000, the State Board of Education passed a rule that provided that districts could provide local requirements for special education students to receive diplomas. The rule provided that there would be a notation on the transcript (but not the diploma) that the student was special education.

These both occurred before I took office. I have asked the Attorney General for a formal opinion as to whether the rule is consistent with the statute, since a diploma indicates “graduation.”

When I was at a meeting of the Paradise Valley School Board, to help celebrate an award won by one of its teachers, I was asked about the status of special education students being able to receive diplomas. I reported these facts, and that I had heard that the Attorney General would probably rule that the rule was consistent with the statute. This was not final, and no promises could be made, but if that was the eventual ruling, it would be good news for special education parents, as the students would be able to receive diplomas pursuant to the rule.

At the same time, but unrelated, I stated that I would recommend that the diplomas have endorsements indicating the degree of proficiency reached by students, in general, on the AIMS test, such as proficient, exceeds proficiency, honors, high honors (which includes a full tuition scholarship at state universities), etc.

I foolishly did not anticipate that such informal comments would be considered newsworthy. However, the resulting news story mistakenly confused the two issues. The idea of endorsements has nothing to do with special education, but is to identify proficiency and the higher levels of proficiency. I never have suggested that an endorsement on the diploma indicate that a student was special education, nor have I heard anyone else suggest that.

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